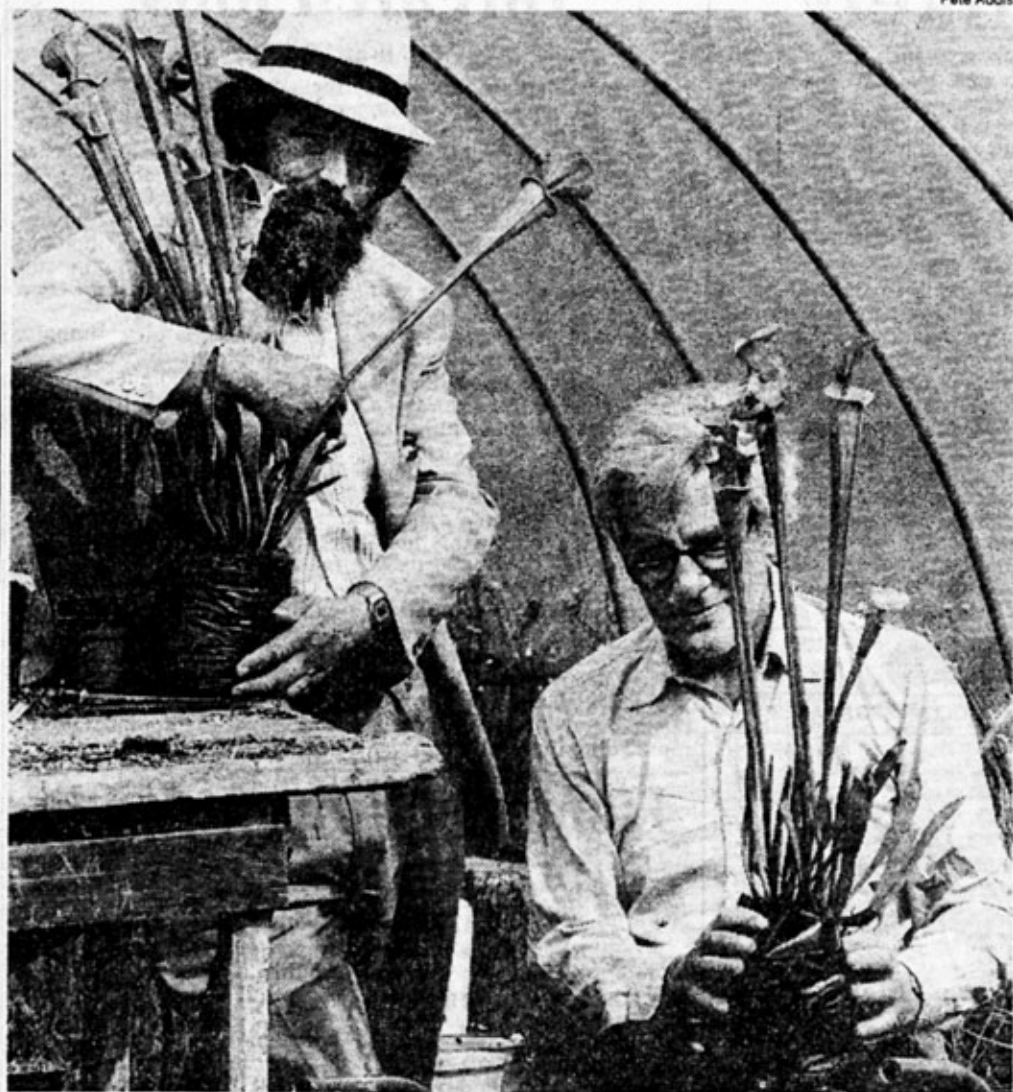


## YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Pete Addis



Timothy Heneage (seated) and Adrian Slack with carnivorous plant *Sarracena Flava Maxima*, which they saved from extinction

Adrian Slack trained as a horticulturalist and for a time was a landscape architect, *Robert Temple writes*. But his passion for years had been carnivorous plants, which mostly eat insects. His house in Somerset was full of these curious flora, and as he continued propagating them he ran out of space.

He used to throw them away when he had too many, according to his partner, Timothy Heneage, also from Somerset. "So", says Mr Heneage, "I suggested to him that he sell them."

From this casual beginning grew their partnership, Marston Exotics, which now supplies more than 200 different kinds of carnivorous plants to all of Europe, America, South America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Saudi Arabia. Mr Heneage says: "Big-sellers are about 50 plants. The biggest one is still the Venus Fly-Trap." It gobbles houseflies with no spray, no fuss and no mess and costs about £2.75.

Mr Heneage put his money where his mouth was. He says: "I forked out about £600 for a

greenhouse, and Adrian supplied all the plants, just to see how well we could propagate them and how we got on." Nobody had done this in Britain since the First World War.

Marston Exotics, formed in 1975, ran as a two-man partnership until John Speirs bought a share in 1981. "That apart," Mr Heneage says, "nobody has really invested any money in the business - just time."

In the first year turnover was about £300. Mr Heneage adds: "When we started, the private grower did not have carnivorous plants. There were small collections in certain botanical gardens, but there was no

market; we had to create our own."

Here Mr Slack came to the rescue. He began to be in demand on television and radio as a personality, and this increased when he published *Carnivorous Plants*, complete with his own botanical drawings, in 1979. Orders to Marston Exotics began to pour in. By 1979, annual turnover was about £20,000 and now is about £40,000. A third of the turnover figure is profit.

The result is a small business which provides the three partners with a basic living and they have additional income from elsewhere. But it is also a service: all the European botanical gardens are supplied, and scores of plants have been saved from extinction.

The company has one of the few plants in cultivation of *Nepenthes raja*, which eats mice and even small monkeys. And their Australian *Byblis gigantea* will germinate only if newspaper is burned over the seed, stimulating a brush fire; it can be pollinated only with a tuning fork which simulates the beating wings of a particular moth.

## A floral hobby blossoms into profit